

ABSTRACT

In 1990, Congress created the Forest Legacy Program to protect environmentally important forest areas that are threatened by present and future conversion to non-forest uses, such as subdivision for residential or commercial development. This protection will be accomplished through the USDA Forest Service working in cooperation with willing landowners, state lead agencies and state stewardship coordinating committees to promote conservation easements and other mechanisms to protect and conserve forest lands. Former governor Booth Gardner designated the Department of Natural Resources as Washington's lead agency for the Forest Legacy Program.

Congress stipulated the state shall develop an assessment of need before establishing its Forest Legacy Program. Washington State's resulting assessment addresses the condition of the state's forest resources including aesthetics, fish and wildlife habitat, geological features, minerals, soil productivity, recreation, timber production, and water quality. This assessment also addresses the cultural and historic uses of the state's forest land, ownership patterns, trends, future uses, demographics and areas threatened by conversion.

The objective of the USDA Forest Service and the Department of Natural Resources is to implement Forest Legacy through public involvement and analysis of land use and regional growth. The Department is using recent analysis done under state statute, the 1991 Growth Management Act, as a cornerstone to the Assessment of Need required for the federal Forest Legacy Program. Washington's Growth Management Act (1991 amendment) provided for the identification of natural resource lands of long-term commercial significance and urban growth areas, as well as identifying Washington's fastest growing counties. The act requires high growth counties to develop comprehensive land use plans within a framework of public involvement; slower growth counties may voluntarily participate.

As part of the statewide assessment of need for the Forest Legacy Program, the Department is required to identify an area, or areas within the state, that demonstrate the greatest need for the program. Public opinion guided the Stewardship Coordinating Committee's recommendation of the proposed Forest Legacy Area.

The Puget Sound Corridor Forest Legacy Area was designated for its statewide contribution of all forest resources (both commodity and non-commodity), and the high rate of conversion of forest lands to non-forest uses. Despite the largest percentage of population and population growth, this region remains important for its forest resources contribution.

There may be future opportunity to propose additional Forest Legacy Areas within Washington. The Department of Natural Resources will continue to work with the State Stewardship Coordinating Committee, other state agencies, local governments and the public to implement a program that can benefit this state for generations to come.

GOALS

The purpose of the Forest Legacy Program in Washington State is to select and protect environmentally important forest lands that are threatened by present or future conversion to non-forest uses. Forest Legacy can help secure a future that will both protect the traditional uses of private forest lands and the public resources those lands provide. Public involvement and close coordination with the USDA Forest Service, the State Stewardship Coordinating Committee and related agencies/programs (i.e. Growth Management Act) will aid a more effective process.

Forest Legacy Areas will include "working forests," where forest land is managed for the production of forest products and traditional forest uses are nurtured and encouraged. These uses will include both commodity production and non-commodity values, such as healthy riparian areas, important scenic, aesthetic, cultural, fish, wildlife and recreation resources and other ecological values.

To accomplish this, interest in lands will be acquired primarily through federal purchase of conservation easements. Fee-title purchases may be used in a very limited number of acquisitions where it is deemed necessary for the program's objectives.

Public comment led the Stewardship Coordinating Committee to recommend these major goals for the Washington State Forest Legacy Program:

- protect water quality
- provide habitat for native fish, wildlife or plants
- provide present or future timber management opportunities
- determine Forest Legacy Areas based on natural rather than artificial (political) boundaries

The Forest Legacy Program should be viewed as a broadly inclusive process that can select and secure a preferred future. It will be vitally important that the USDA Forest Service, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, the State Stewardship Coordinating Committee, the public, forest landowners and local land trusts work together in a highly interactive environment to support such a future. The USDA Forest Service and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources will subsequently enter into a Memorandum of Understanding to facilitate successful, long-term implementation of the Forest Legacy Program.